

New project on KRG policies for mitigating the impact of displaced people

Middle East Research Institute
www.meri-k.org

Press Release

The Middle East Research Institute (MERI) has initiated an ambitious study examining the economic, security and social impacts of the current refugee and internally displaced people (IDPs) crisis in the Kurdistan region. The crisis started in 2013 with the flood of refugees fleeing from the Syria's civil war, worsened by the sudden displacement of Iraqis from the provinces of Anbar, Niniwa and Tikrit. With the latest displacement of Christians and Yazidis, the crisis has now reached a critical level.

This crisis poses a big challenge for Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) due to the sudden and disproportional influx of large numbers of refugees and IDPs into this small region. Meanwhile, the KRG is facing an existential war against the Islamic State, while being deprived of funds for the past several months by the Baghdad Government. These factors have further reduced the KRG's capacity to absorb the impacts of the arrival of refugees and IDPs.

The displacement of these people in such numbers, and from different ethnic, religious and geographical backgrounds, have been perceived to have a significant impact on Kurdistan's economy and society. For example, there has been claims of an unusual increase in food and housing prices, energy shortages, lack of employment and a plunge in wages. Interestingly, the positive effects, such as a resurgence of private activities, have largely been ignored. Inevitably, the crisis may also bring the risk of outbursts violence within society due to disputes or political rivalry.

These concerns highlight the need to initiate a comprehensive study in order to tackle the fundamental issues that are key to a satisfactory management of the refugee crisis. A long-term strategic plan is required to turn the burden of refugees and IDPs into an asset. Solid

evidence on the role of refugees in the current economic deterioration and perceived security risks will be required before the any impact can be addressed adequately. MERI has started research on these elements, by gathering fundamental and operational data, with the aim of providing the KRG with meaningful analysis and practical policy recommendations.

As Mr Roger Guiu, MERI's Research Fellow leading this project, is quoted here saying:

“The population within the KRG boundaries has actually increased by more than 15% in a very short time period. Indeed this has had a significant impact and increased the pressure on the Kurdish society. But any policy adopted by the KRG must be supported by solid evidence on the economic and security impacts, and must not just rely on anecdotes and popular perceptions. Any policy decision made by the KRG will have significant consequences in the long term.”

Mr Guiu also said:

“The impacts attributed to the refugee crisis are based on popular perceptions and their validity has not been evaluated yet. A lack of evidence hinders the success of any policy designed to solve the crisis. For instance, the arrival of displaced people has coincided with worrisome economic trends originated from the economic boom in Kurdistan. Real estate sector skyrocketed making housing less affordable. Energy demand increased more than the generation capacity. The agriculture sector is struggling and most of the food is imported. Geopolitical factors such as trade disruptions also contributed to these impacts. Therefore, it is not directly clear that these impacts would disappear even without the presence of displaced people.”

Mr Guiu emphasised that once the real causes and consequences of the crisis are fully understood, better recommendation of policies and their mechanisms of implementation can be adopted. For this, Mr Guiu stated:

“There are some questions that must be asked in order to propose mitigation policies. For instance, should the KRG adopt a more restrictive policy for refugees or it would put things worse? Can they design a greater overarching policy package with actions required from many ministries? How can social cohesion be improved in order to prevent outbursts of violence or social unrest? What policies can provide long-term employment opportunities for both host communities and displaced people? How can the perception of burden be overcome within the Kurdish society? Finally, which conditions are needed to help displaced people return to their homes?”

MERI is an independent research institute that works with a number of key stakeholders on this crisis and welcomes partnership and collaborative interaction with others.

